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Christiane von Reichert

University of Montana, Chris.vonreichert@mso.umt.edu

John B. Cromartie

United States Department of Agriculture, jbc@ers.usda.gov

Ryan O. Arthun

University of Montana, ryan.arthun@mso.umt.edu

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Chapter 14

Intergenerational Relationships and Rural Return Migration

Christiane von Reichert, John B. Cromartie, and Ryan O. Arthun

14.1 Introduction

In the rural United States (US), where roughly one in five Americans live, elderly are overrepresented, with 14.6% of the population versus 12% for the nation (US Census Bureau 2009a). Additionally, the proportion of elderly is growing faster in rural than in urban places due to persistent outmigration of rural youth (Cromartie 2007; Brown and Glasgow 2008). The shrinking proportion of younger cohorts represents a serious challenge for many rural communities. Especially in geographically isolated areas where elderly make up 18% of the population, prolonged and persistent out-migration of youth goes hand in hand with natural population loss (McGranahan and Beale 2002). The vitality and long-term sustainability of many rural places is called into question. Concern for these issues sparked our research.

When embarking on this project, we did not plan to study aging in rural places. Instead, we set out to explore return migration to rural communities. We wanted to understand what motivates people to move back to rural places they left shortly after graduating from high school. In the process, we discovered that concern for family and an appreciation of intergenerational relationships were important in influencing people's decision to move back to their rural home town. The presence of aging parents residing in the rural community turned out to be a critical element for promoting rural return migration.

C. von Reichert (✉) • R.O. Arthun
Department of Geography, University of Montana, Stone Hall 208,
Missoula, MT 59812-0648, USA
e-mail: Chris.vonreichert@mso.umt.edu; ryan.arthun@mso.umt.edu

J.B. Cromartie
Economic Research Service, US Department of Agriculture,
1400 Independence Avenue SW, Mail Stop 1800,
Washington, DC 20250-0002, USA
e-mail: jbc@ers.usda.gov

The motivations for rural return migration can be understood from perspectives on intergenerational relationships and migration over the life course. Existing studies on intergenerational relationships tend to, as pointed out by Rossi and Rossi (1990), either focus on the relationship between parents and young children (*alpha stage*) or between adult children and their aging parents (*omega stage*). Studies involving aging parents typically explore these relationships from the perspective of the parent. The literature on intergenerational, familial relationships further tends to focus on relationships that involve support between generations, whether altruistic support or exchange relationships of giving and receiving (Hogan et al. 1993; Eggebeen and Hogan 1990). To examine intergenerational support relationships, many studies employ survey and quantitative methodologies.

Our work differs from and supplements prior studies on intergenerational relationships and on age-related migration in several ways. Instead of using a quantitative, survey-based approach, this work relies on interviews and employs a qualitative approach. Given our qualitative methodology, we did not focus a priori on support and exchange relationships. Instead, our interviews about return migration were open-ended and focused on reasons for returning. Responses revealed the complexity of return migration decisions and strong connections to intergenerational and kinship relations among those who returned. Further, our work explored intergenerational relationships from the perspective of adult children, not of aging parents. Because many of the individuals whom we interviewed also have children, the impact of a third generation of young children and teenagers could also be considered. We examined not only the parent-child connection but also the grandparent-grandchild connection, which turned out to be relevant for return migration as well.

Favorable intergenerational relationships may more easily be sustained in closer geographic proximity between generations, and migration can either increase or decrease the geographic distance between generations. Migration research involving the relationship between adult children and their aging parents tends to focus on aging parents who move to be closer to their adult children (Litwak and Longino 1987; Rogerson et al. 1993, 1997). Some migration studies are based on aggregate data for regions, making it difficult (and inappropriate) to uncover individual motivations for migration. Other studies are based on surveys where respondents are specifically asked about reasons for migrating. Qualitative studies on elderly mobility, such as the work of McHugh and Mings (1996), are relatively rare. In contrast to the move of elderly parents nearer to their adult children, the move of adult children to be closer to their aging parents is rarely examined (Michielin et al. 2008; Pettersson and Malmberg 2009). However, this type of move is exactly what we repeatedly encountered in our conversations with rural return migrants.

The following section establishes the background for understanding intergenerational relationships and return migration (1) by introducing concepts and empirical findings on intergenerational relationships and (2) by highlighting elements from the migration literature that help to understand these relationships and life course migration. A brief methodology section introduces study population and study area, and outlines our approach to gathering data. Our findings section demonstrates that relationships between generations and especially the location of aging parents are

important for understanding why people move back or do not move back to the rural community where they graduated from high school. Finally, we offer a summary of findings and discuss the implications of this work for rural aging and rural communities.

14.2 Background: Intergenerational Relationships and Migration

14.2.1 Intergenerational Relationships: Concepts

Relationships between generations are often expressed as relationships of solidarity (Mangen et al. 1988; Rossi and Rossi 1990). The literature on intergenerational relationships refers to different, partly overlapping types of intergenerational solidarities (see Krause 2009; Bengtson 2001; Rossi and Rossi 1990). We are singling out functional solidarity (support or aid) as the most commonly addressed and affective solidarity (emotion or affect) as very infrequently addressed types of solidarity. Both are important for understanding rural return migration.

14.2.1.1 Functional Relationships

Functional intergenerational solidarity, or support relationships involving the giving and receiving of help between generations, have perhaps been more closely examined than any other type of intergenerational relationships (Hogan et al. 1993). They are most often used to explain relationships between adult children and their aging parents. Intergenerational support or aid may be in the form of advice and comfort, caregiving, help during illness and crisis, regular or ad-hoc help with household maintenance, financial help, special gifts, and the like (modified from Rossi and Rossi 1990, p. 30). In rural areas, where services tend to be less available, providing transportation is another important way of aiding elderly and, with that, enabling them to access services (Prosper and Clark 1994; Krout 1994). While some forms of support are relatively independent of proximity and distance, such as advice or financial help, many other forms of support, such as caregiving, help with household tasks and repairs, and transportation services greatly rely on proximity between giver and recipient (Hogan et al. 1993).

Help given and received in intergenerational relationships can be altruistic or reciprocal (exchange), and studies on reciprocity or the social exchange between generations are common. Social exchange may occur roughly at the same time or alternatively be distributed across the life course. For exchange over the life course, Rangel (2003) distinguishes between forward and backward intergenerational exchange. Forward exchange involves a transfer from prior to next generations, such as parents taking care of their young and adolescent children. Backward

exchange is a transfer from next to prior generations, such as adult children offering support to aging parents.

Interest in backward intergenerational support from adult child to aging parent has been growing (Kingson 1989) as the number and proportion of elderly among the population increased from 12 million or 8% of the US population in 1950 (US Census Bureau 1952) to 35 million or 12% of the US Population in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2002). By 2040, the number of elderly is expected to reach 80 million (US Census Bureau 2008). This is a result of longer life expectancies and the aging of the large cohort of baby boomers, which is beginning to reach retirement age. Due to rural aging and in-migration of elderly, many rural areas will be especially affected by the growth of elderly cohorts (Cromartie and Nelson 2009). With the growth in number and proportions of elderly, issues of aging and intergenerational support relationships have become more and more relevant for policy. Older people desire to stay in their own dwelling as they age, and public policy trends have shifted by de-emphasizing institutional care (Prosper and Clark 1994). This creates a greater need for informal caregiving, which is often reliant on family. However, the role of kinship and support relations is thought to have diminished due to the rise of the core family (Burgess 1960). Yet, members of extended families were found to be available to help one another in times of need (Bengtson 2001; Michielin et al. 2008; Connidis 2001). Connidis (2001), for instance, points out that one third of elderly persons requiring help receive it from an adult child. Family, therefore, makes up part of the social capital that elderly can draw on as a personal resource (Hendricks and Hatch 2009). The strength of the relationship between adult children and aging parents seems to further depend on the presence of grandchildren (Hogan et al. 1993). Aging parents and adult children often seek to live nearer to each other if there are grandchildren (Pettersson and Malmberg 2009). Greater proximity between grandchildren and grandparents allows for more social contact which can promote closer affective bonds.

14.2.1.2 Affective Relationships

While many studies on intergenerational relationships emphasize intergenerational dependence and support given or received, relatively few studies—such as Bengtson (2001), Merz et al. (2009), and Rossi and Rossi (1990)—also explore affective and emotional relationships between generations.

In their study of three generations Rossi and Rossi (1990) found that affective relationships between parents and their children are strong during childhood, but then weaken during adolescence. After the often troubled and stormy teenage years, affective relationships recover. Affective relationships reach a new peak when adult children are between 30 and 40 (Rossi and Rossi 1990). At this age, many adult children are themselves parents in the child-rearing phase and therefore have more interests in common with their own parents. Additionally, their children are their parents' grandchildren, allowing for grandparent–grandchild interaction. The bonds between adult children and their aging parents are particularly strong, if the now

adult children held fond memories of family relationships during their childhood years (Hogan et al. 1993; Rossi and Rossi 1990). The nature of affective relationships appears to be shaped by past patterns rather than by the maturing and aging process (Connidis 2001). As people move through the aging process, however, they tend to assign greater meaning to emotional bonds with family and friends (Krause 2009).

Affective relationships also influence the linkages between exchange and well-being. Merz et al. (2009) found that the strength of affective relationships influences how support between adult children and their aging parents is viewed by both. If affective bonds are strong, adult children find it easier to give support, and aging parents find it easier to accept support. On the other hand, if affective bonds are weak, both giving support and receiving it is more challenging and less gratifying. Merz et al. (2009) conclude that well-being of both adult children and aging parents in support and exchange relationships is enhanced by strong affective bonds.

14.2.2 Migration, Family Relationships, Dependence, and Aging

For decades, migration research focused more on economic than other reasons for migration: on employment, income, or both (Greenwood 1975; Hicks 1932; Lowry 1966; Sjaastad 1962). In response to the metro-nonmetro migration turnaround (Beale 1975), quality of life reasons, especially as related to amenity migration, received greater attention (Shumway and Otterstrom 2001; Brown and Glasgow 2008; McGranahan 1999; Nelson 1999; Rudzitis 1999; von Reichert and Rudzitis 1992). Although family-motivated moves have long been and continue to be important in understanding geographic mobility (Brown and Glasgow 2008; Rossi 1955; Leistritz et al. 2000; Litwak and Longino 1987), family reasons and family relationships have been studied to a much lesser extent.

14.2.2.1 Migration and Family Relations

In his classic work, *Why Families Move*, Peter Rossi (1955) demonstrated that geographic mobility is often linked to family reasons. The needs of children, for instance, strongly induce or inhibit residential mobility (defined as moves within the same activity space, typically within the same county). Quite a few survey-based studies also point toward the importance of family reasons for migration (defined as moves to a different activity space, typically to a different county). A survey of migrants to North Dakota and Nebraska, for instance, showed that over 50% of migrants quote being closer to family as one of the reasons for moving there (Leistritz et al. 2000). A survey of Montana migrants similarly revealed that roughly one third of both new and returning migrants to the state primarily moved for family reasons (von Reichert 2002).

The relatively recent 'reasons for moving' question included in the Current Population Survey (CPS) shows that family (excluding change in marital status

or establishing a new household) accounts for 14% of all moves, and 18% of inter-county moves. For people 75 and older, these proportions are 27% and 35%, respectively (US Census Bureau 2009b), showing that elderly are the most inclined to make family-oriented moves. Older persons, if retired, are largely free of work obligations, giving them greater flexibility in making relocation decisions when compared to their adult children in the labor force and family stage. Aging parents can more easily migrate for familial reasons, and CPS data show that they do.

To shed more light on elderly migration, Litwak and Longino (1987) proposed a three-stage model of aging and migration: People in their late-50s to mid-60s move to rural areas in search of natural amenities and a slower pace of life (Stage 1). However, as rural-bound migrants move through the aging process, they may not stay in rural communities as increasing age and concomitantly declining health may result in a greater need for assistance in everyday life. Unless they have support groups already nearby, they seek greater proximity to and support from family. Not surprisingly, when elderly (in their 70s) move, they commonly move to live closer to adult children (Litwak and Longino 1987; Plane and Jurjevich 2009; Rogerson et al. 1993, 1997). Closer proximity to family can provide them with support of daily activities and companionship (Stage 2). When the need for support grows beyond a family's capacity to care, a third elderly move toward a care facility may occur (Stage 3).

Stage 2 of the Litwak-Longino model is very useful for understanding the high incidence of family-oriented moves among elderly. Seemingly less common and also less studied is the move of adult children to live closer to their aging parents. For adult children in the labor force (and often in the family stage), job constraints and obligations toward their own children can explain the reduced propensity to move to be closer to parents. However, the move of adult children back to rural communities they left after high school is exactly the type of move discovered in the process of our research and considered here.

14.2.2.2 Aging, Intergenerational Dependence, and Migration

One of the most enduring phenomena of geographic mobility is how mobility changes with age: People make decisions about moving (or not moving) as they progress through life. During transitions into different life course stages, mobility may rise sharply, drop off quickly, or stay fairly constant. Figure 14.1 shows the well-known age migration schedule, derived from the 2007 American Community Survey (ACS, US Census Bureau 2009c). The strong age dependence in mobility is connected to approximate life course stages, which are highlighted in the chart.

We elaborate on the themes of age, family and career life course stage, and intergenerational dependence as they are helpful for understanding rural return migration. We refer to commonly observed, yet simplified life course stages while fully recognizing their greater complexity and the social contexts that affect migration decisions over the life course (Geist and McManus 2008).

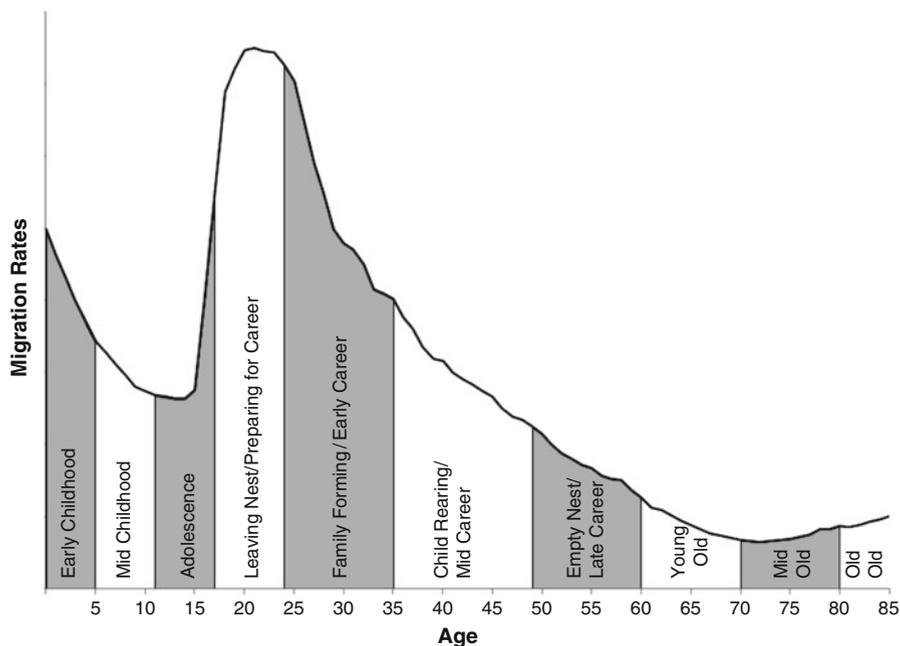


Fig. 14.1 Migration by age and approximate life course stages (Source: Derived from ACS 2007 migration expectancy data (US Census Bureau 2009c); approximate life course stages added by authors)

Young children, as family members heavily dependent on their parents, are found to move a good deal. This is because their parents, as young adults in the early stage of building a career and forming a family, move to meet the objectives of their career, as well as housing goals of their family. Parents make those moves because they often directly benefit both their own career and the well-being of their young children, while not greatly disrupting their children's upbringing. Families with teenage children, however, especially if in high school, move very little, as relocations at that age are thought to negatively affect adolescents. Parents of teenagers are usually in their late 30s to late 40s or early 50s. The low mobility during this child-rearing phase coincides with the mid-career stage when people settle down for the sake of their family as well as their career. Following the low mobility phase characteristic of adolescents, mobility spikes sharply for people in their late teens to early 20s as young adults move away from the parental home and 'leave the nest' for college, a job, or other personal reasons. This 'launch' is often associated with establishing and demonstrating independence from the previous generation (Plane and Jurjevich 2009). Indeed, moving after high school has long been a rite of passage in the US. The parents left behind by their grown-up children become 'empty nesters' as early as the late 40s but more commonly in the mid- to late 50s. With the next generation 'launched' and the 'nest empty' parents experience an increased independence from the next generation, their children. At the beginning

of this stage, late 40- to 50-year olds are also relatively independent from the previous generation, their parents, as their aging parents are typically among the ‘young old’ to ‘mid old,’ in their late 60s and early 70s. Young-old and mid-old parents tend to enjoy good physical health and relatively good financial health. As a result, recent ‘empty nesters’ have a window of greater independence from both next and prior generations (Plane and Jurjevich 2009). Plane and Jurjevich further suggest that this intergenerational independence could increase locational flexibility. Indeed, the move of pre-retirees and early retirees to amenity destinations may be a result of this greater locational and intergenerational flexibility. As time passes, however, adult children (in their 50s and early 60s) may feel greater obligations toward their aging parents, who gradually—or in some instances abruptly—experience a decline in health and have a greater need for support. To the extent that this support is provided by their adult children, elderly parents become increasingly dependent on the next generation (Wenger and Keating 2008).

Opportunities for intergenerational support often hinge on close geographic proximity because geographic proximity allows for more frequent interaction. Most older parents and adult children show a preference for living not far from one another, and the majority of aging parents live within an hour or less of an adult child (Connidis 2001; Lawton et al. 1994). Geographic proximity, in turn, allows for giving or receiving support and for maintaining and growing affective bonds between generations (Michielin et al. 2008). Distance, on the other hand, limits exchange relationships (Hogan et al. 1993; Rogerson et al. 1993, 1997). If people left their parents’ home as young adults, and moved away, greater geographic proximity could be achieved by two types of ‘corrective’ moves. Aging parents could either move closer to adult children or, alternatively, adult children could move closer to aging parents. While the first option seems to be more common in general, the second option describes the situation we often encountered when exploring rural return migration.

14.3 Methodology

14.3.1 Study Population

In exploring rural return migration, we focus on people in their late 20s to late 40s. These are adults in the early stage of their career, in mid career, or approaching the late stage of their career. The study participants span family life course stages from family-forming to child-rearing phase and the onset of the empty-nester phase. Members of the younger cohort usually have strong obligations to the next generation (their small children), but they do not yet have obligations to the prior generation (their parents). The older cohort typically has diminishing obligations toward the next generation (teenage children or young adults) but increasing obligations toward the prior generation (aging parents). Importantly, most people in these age

groups need to have employment, which consequently affects where they choose to live.

Table 14.1 provides a generalized description of the study population (ranging in age from the late 20s to late 40s), the corresponding life course stages, and intergenerational context. Intergenerational context includes the life course stages of children, of aging parents, and forward and backward relationships between study population and other generations.

14.3.2 Study Area

The communities we targeted were of small to moderate size, with populations ranging from 800 to over 10,000. Our focus is on geographically isolated nonmetropolitan counties (von Reichert 2008) in regions with relatively low natural amenities, as identified in a US comparison (Economic Research Service 1999). The communities considered here face challenges in a variety of ways, as places of production (with small and isolated labor markets) and places of consumption (with lower levels of natural amenities). As places of production, smaller communities tend to have small local labor markets and are limited in the range and diversity of locally-available employment opportunities. In contrast to communities close to metropolitan areas, workers in isolated communities cannot readily tap into metropolitan labor markets by commuting. As places of consumption, many lower amenity counties, especially if isolated, tend to lose population through out-migration. This contrasts with many high amenity counties, which have gained population through in-migration (McGranahan and Beale 2002). Consequently, the study communities considered here represent neither employment magnets nor amenity-rich leisure locations, making the question of what draws returning migrants to them particularly intriguing.

14.3.3 Collecting Interview Data

In summer and early fall of 2008 and 2009, we traveled to 21 communities in geographically isolated areas to interview people at 10- to 30-year high school reunions. Reunions were chosen because they are the only venues that allow one to simultaneously connect with stayers (who never moved away), with out-migrants (who moved away and now live elsewhere), and with return migrants (who moved away and later returned).

Visits to high school reunions in rural communities were the result of a lengthy process of identifying high schools located in the study communities, selecting and contacting schools, finding reunions, and targeting classes to capture a range of ages (people in their late 20s at 10-year reunions to people in their late 40s at 30-year reunions). We obtained permission from reunion organizers to attend reunion events

Table 14.1 Study population, life course stages, and intergenerational context

Attributes and life course stages		Cohorts of the study population	
Study population	Age at interview	Late 20s	Late 30s
	Demographic cohort (year born)	Baby boom echo (born early 1980s)	Baby bust (born early 1970s)
	Career stages	Early career	Mid career
	Family stages	Family forming	Child rearing
Intergenerational context	Aging parents' life course stages	Labor force or 'young old' (late career or retiring)	'Young old' to 'mid old' (early to mid retirement)
	Children's life course stages	Early childhood	Mid childhood
	Relationship to next or prior generation	Mostly forward solidarity toward young children	Mostly forward solidarity toward children
			Mid to late career
			Approaching 'empty nest' 'Mid old' to 'old old' (mid to late retirement)
			Adolescence
			Increasing backward solidarity toward aging parents

and interview classmates. In several communities, we attended more than one reunion for a total of 27 reunions: seven 10-year reunions, one 15-year reunion, ten 20-year reunions, one 25-year reunion, and eight 30-year reunions. With approval, we digitally recorded the conversations, transcribed them, and identified themes using NVivo, a software program that is helpful for organizing text data.

This chapter focuses on interviews with returning migrants but also takes into account responses from out-migrants and people who stayed in their community after high school. Over the course of two summers, we had the opportunity to speak with over 300 individuals at class reunions for conversations that lasted from a few minutes to a half hour. While visiting communities, we also spoke with dozens of community leaders and return migrants outside of high school reunions for lengthier conversations ranging from 20 minutes to over an hour.

High school reunions are both suitable and limited as research venues. High school reunions are not a representative sample of a graduating class, as participants are self-selected. Not everyone attends their class reunion, and people who come to class reunions tend to have relatively strong ties to their classmates and other childhood friends. One would expect such ties to develop more easily in rural schools with relatively small classes. This could explain why the tradition of holding and attending class reunions is strong in many parts of rural America, as we learned in the process of locating and attending reunions. Even with overall high participation rates at rural high school reunions, a self-selection bias nonetheless remains, making reunions problematic for representing a graduating class. On the other hand, the appeal of reunions for people who maintained ties to the people and the place where they graduated from high school makes them suitable as sites to learn about the attraction of rural communities. The self-selection bias of high school reunions is therefore an advantage for answering our overarching research questions about the draw of rural places.

14.4 Findings

The large number of conversations reveals recurring themes related to intergenerational relations: people move back to rural places for their children and for their parents. Both functional solidarity between generations and affective bonds play a role. The following sections elaborate on these themes in more detail.

14.4.1 *Moving for Their Children*

In speaking to people in their late 20s to their late 40s, we found that many people had moved back to their rural community for their children's sake. They wanted to raise them in an environment with which they as parents were familiar and comfortable: *I would not have known my children had we raised them in Houston.* They also

wanted to raise their children in an environment they thought of as safe: *Where else can you tell your little one, go out and down the street, and not worry about them?* Many also expressed appreciation for the rural school systems being supportive of their children and for providing academic and athletic opportunities: *The school system is awesome.* Often, to achieve these benefits, parents accepted sacrifices in their own careers by taking jobs that required lower qualifications than they possessed, by settling for lower pay, or by foregoing opportunities for promotions: *If it were not for my children, I would be living somewhere else making a lot more money.*

In many instances, the move back to the rural town was associated with obligation towards children, and therefore occurred in a phase of great intergenerational dependence. Plane and Jurjevich's (2009) proposition that people who move down the urban hierarchy toward rural places are in the empty-nester stage and are relatively independent of intergenerational obligations does not describe the rural return migrants we encountered. While the return migrants we spoke with typically move down the urban hierarchy, the returnees in their late 20s to late 30s are typically in the stage of family formation or child rearing, and not the empty-nester stage. Very few of the interviewees in their late 40s had adult children who had already left the home (although a number were approaching that phase). Most returnees we encountered were in a period of great intergenerational dependence with forward obligations toward the next generation. The rural-bound moves observed in this research cannot therefore be explained as having high levels of intergenerational independence.

14.4.2 Presence of Parents and Other Relatives

Although the commitment to their children was important for moving back to their rural high school community, in practically all instances, return migration hinged on parents and other family still living in the rural home town. Many of the return migrants had a spouse who also grew up in the region or grew up in a similar type of community. Our interviews revealed that, if the parents had moved away, the incentive and inclination to return was greatly diminished and practically eliminated, as out-migrants repeatedly stated: *There is nothing here. My parents don't live here, and there are no jobs.* The town where people grew up and graduated from high school no longer has a draw, if the parents do not live there anymore, which highlights the importance of intergenerational relationships.

However, we also spoke with many out-migrants who left and did not move back although their parents still live in town. In those instances, ties to parents and the community are maintained through visits. These out-migrants often commented favorably on the town—without expressing a strong desire for moving back. At 30-year reunions, quite a few out-migrants mentioned one of the following or both scenarios that could motivate them to move back: (1) A return move upon retirement when they leave the labor force and become free of employment constraints.

They point out that limited rural labor markets have barred them from moving back; (2) A return move if their parents' health diminishes and parents need their help. They feel an obligation to the previous generation that is sufficiently strong to induce a move when necessary: *Well, your family is always number one. Especially if your mom and dad are old and can't take care of themselves, then you would have to put a hold on your life to take care of them, or they would have to come and move with you.*

More commonly, however, out-migrants interviewed at 30-year reunions (in their late 40s) expressed little desire to move back: *I actually enjoy where I live and there is just not a lot that I miss.* They had either put roots down where they now live and did not plan on moving any time soon, or, if they were to move away from their current location, they would move to be closer to their own children.

The presence of parents seems to be practically a requirement, but not a sufficient condition for people to move back to their rural home town. Additional conditions must fall into place for a return move to occur. In many instances, out-migrants without return intentions expressed a preference for urban or suburban life styles for themselves as well as their children.

14.4.3 *Functional Solidarity*

The literature on intergenerational relationships between adult children and aging parents stresses functional solidarity and the exchange of support through giving and receiving. For the age groups considered here, backward exchange (help given to aging parent) clearly exists but does not play an exclusive role. This is not surprising, as the parents of people in their late 20s to late 30s tend to be in their 50s and 60s or early 70s, and parents of people in their late 40s are typically in their 70s or early 80s. Except for the last group, aging parents are relatively young—even of working age, and of good health with limited need for receiving support from their children in their daily lives.

A few of the younger returnees with small children as well as other relatively young parents mentioned functional solidarity as forward exchange (from aging parents to adult children and grandchildren) in the form of child care: *My parents are about 15 miles and so are his parents, so we have baby sitters on each side. My kids can grow up with their grandparents and grow up in the country and the small town.* Those instances, however, were relatively rare. Some out-migrants lament not having access to family support networks for their children where they currently live. *It's hard to raise a family [without your family there]. I have three children of my own and it's really difficult with no help [from parents].*

In terms of backward linkages, we repeatedly spoke with people who returned to help their parents with a farm or a business: *When my grandfather died, dad needed help with the farm.* Or: *We came back to keep the land in the family.* Another returnee explained: *I came back to help my father in his insurance business.* Or: *My father had a bunch of rentals and I came back to help him with those.* These statements

tend to come from people in their late 30s and late 40s but not the younger cohort in their late 20s. The return move of adult children in mid life to support the family enterprise seems to be triggered by the needs of the prior generation owning local businesses and farms. Because local businesses and especially farms are place bound and tied to a particular locale, support for them generally requires close geographic proximity to them. While a return move to assist with a family business tends to help the parents and the business, it also positions adult children to take the place of aging parents. Consequently, return moves can facilitate the transitioning of rural businesses, which otherwise can be challenging in rural areas, as a conversation with a community leader revealed.

Return migration to aid aging parents outside of farm and family businesses occurs under two scenarios: to aid with routine affairs and to aid in crisis. Parents in need of assistance with everyday chores or transportation to services largely coincide with the age group of Stage 2 of the Litwak-Longino model (1987): aging parents experience diminished health and at times are widowed. With limited support, they can often function well in a living environment to which they are accustomed. Thanks to the return migration of some adult children, aging parents can stay in a familiar environment. Interestingly, we encountered relatively few instances where returning moves were primarily to offer routine help.

One person who moved back to be closer to parents and other family members described her choice as more desirable for the aging parents. She prefers that elderly stay and age in place over moving because staying allows for continuity in social networks. Referring to others, she states: *When their parents' health fails, they move their parents closer to them. But they and their kids are so busy! The old people are often really alone because they don't know anyone there except for their children and grandchildren. If the parents had stayed here, there would be someone to take them shopping, and someone else to take them to the doctor. They have lived here all their lives and have friends and a support network in the community. They (adult children) mean well, but it's often not in the best interest for the old people.*

Return in response to a crisis, mentioned more frequently than returns to help with daily routines, usually occurs as the health of a parent (or grandparent) abruptly deteriorates. The effect on the return migrant's life is equally abrupt, as the following examples of a highly-successful professional attests. She had worked in one of America's mega-cities and her career trajectory came to a sudden halt: *I was in my 40s and my mother took a very severe turn for the worse. My father, at that point, was in his 80s and not able to care for someone... I left that office, and it was the best office I had ever worked for.... But I just felt a commitment to them.*

The health crises described to us were often temporary, although quite commonly return migration was more permanent. A lawyer who moved back from New York and continues to live in his home town explained: *I moved back for my family. My dad was diagnosed with a serious heart condition and was given limited time. But he is fine now—and that was several years ago.* Another returnee who moved in response to a crisis but then stayed on explained: *I was raised by my granddad and I moved my family back here to help him... I am glad I did, as he passed away within a couple of months after we moved back. We decided to stay because my boys love it here.*

Functional solidarity between generations shifts, as expected, with the life course stage. The concept of forward functional solidarity (toward the next generation) helps in understanding the return of young parents who move for their children's sake. Backward functional solidarity toward aging parents is more useful for understanding return migration to support the family enterprise and in response to aging parents' or grandparents' crises than for routine-type help.

14.4.4 Affective Relationships and Beyond

Functional support relationships between generations, while often stressed in the literature, help us understand some but not all aspects of rural return moves. Quite often interviewees spoke of affective bonds between generations and how such bonds influenced their decision to move back. Frequently we heard: *We moved back to be closer to family. Or: I simply wanted to be closer to my mom.* People with fond childhood memories especially, spoke strongly of affective bonds: *I grew up in a big family, always surrounded by siblings, aunts and uncles, cousins. I never had a babysitter.* Never having a hired babysitter attests to familial support. It says much about the strength of the social network between members of the same as well as different generations. However, people portray family support not necessarily through a pragmatic lens; they express pride and speak fondly of strong affective relationships.

All but a few return migrants we spoke with had children of their own. And the welfare of their children was an important consideration in the return move. Especially if individuals held favorable memories of growing up in their rural home town, they felt nostalgic about their upbringing and wanted to replicate their own experiences for their children. *I want my child to grow up like I did,* was repeatedly stated.

Many return migrants also strongly value interpersonal relationships, especially relationships with their own parents: *I want my children growing up knowing their grandparents.* People who moved back to support a sick or dying parent also made the move to allow for intergenerational bonding: *We also moved back for our children: to make some memories with our parents.*

Other family members, especially siblings, were frequently also mentioned, and their presence added to the reasons why people move back to rural places: *My mom is here, and I got two brothers and sisters here.* Theories of intergenerational functional support suggest that the presence of siblings diminish the need to return to aid aging parents, as obligations toward the parents can already be met by the nearby sibling. Indeed, a few individuals who had moved away expressed relief that one or more siblings lived near their parents and could assist them as they age: *I am really thankful that my sister is here to help with my parents as they age. I think that's very admirable. I count on her to do that so I don't have to feel the responsibility.*

More commonly, the opposite was the case. Siblings, especially if they had children, added to what drew people back to their home town: *When I moved back*

I could be near nieces and nephews and everything. We encountered several returnees who moved back because one or several siblings had moved back as well. This further suggests that affective relationships are important in motivating return migration and that intergenerational support obligations toward aging parents alone are not sufficient to understand rural return migration. Our interviews with returning migrants indicate that affective bonds to both parents and other family are a critical element in rural return migration.

The remarks of several return migrants suggest that they viewed the grandchild-grandparent linkage as more than an affective relationship but an important piece of their children's socialization and upbringing. They stressed that interactions between their children and their parents provided opportunities for their children to adopt values and acquire skills from their parents, a sort of 'social inheritance' or 'social transmission': *My kids are with their grandparents right now. Being with them on a farm, they learn about hard work and they pick up some skills—and stay out of mischief. Or: My three boys want to be around grandma, so we gotta be where grandma lives... My wife's grandmother used to pick cotton when she was a child. You know that kind of thing that is done by machine now. That is hard work and you learn from those experiences, even though you didn't have them personally... We bale hay around here for horses and cows and what not; hard labor, that everybody kind of gets together and does as a group... You want your kids to have the values that you grow up with.*

Returnees expect that through the relationship with their grandparents, their own children gain greater appreciation of a rural life style, stay connected to their rural heritage, and adopt small-town values: *If we would have been raised on Long Island, we would not have moved here. It's not for the place: We moved back here for the people—for the people and for the values.*

14.5 Summary and Implications

Familial and intergenerational relationships are important for understanding rural return migration. When people move back to geographically isolated rural communities with limited natural amenities, they relocate partly for the place as such, but more commonly for the people and the relationships they have with them. The family is at the core of these interpersonal relationships.

Family reasons are remarkably important in motivating rural return migration. Concern for their children and the desire—or need—to live closer to their parents greatly matter to people who return. The presence of parents thus is critical in influencing the decision to move back. If the parents have moved away from the rural community, the incentive to return is greatly diminished. On the other hand, if parents still live in a rural home town and especially if siblings also live nearby, the desire to return is often strong.

Returning moves can be understood through intergenerational solidarity of both functional relationships and affective bonds. The interviews affirm that shifts in the

nature of these solidarities occur as people progress through the life course. For people in their late 20s to late 30s, intergenerational obligations and dependence are focused more on forward solidarity toward the next generation (their own children) than backward solidarity toward the prior generation (their aging parents). But strong affective bonds to parents and other family members and fond childhood memories increase the propensity to move back. Such bonds and memories also encourage parents to seek out environments that enable their children to have childhood experiences that resemble their own upbringing in a rural place. The presence of their own parents in the rural hometown and the grandparent-grandchild relationship can play a critical role in promoting and replicating that experience for their children.

The return moves of people from their mid-30s to their late 40s are often motivated by backward solidarity in the form of obligations to their parents (or other family). Interviewees often cite this for return moves that already occurred or for return moves they would consider in the future should the need arise. Backward solidarity motivates adult children to move back to: (1) help with or take over a family business, (2) assist aging parents with routine activities, and (3) especially to respond to parents' or grandparents' health crises. For some returnees, the move back to help family in crisis meant a dramatic adjustment in their own career path, putting their career abruptly on hold. Our interviews suggest that the crisis situations were commonly temporary. After a resolution to the crisis, several return migrants nonetheless opted to stay. This suggests that the rural community exerts a draw above and beyond immediate family needs.

14.5.1 Implications of Return Migration for Rural Aging and Rural Communities

This research on return migration has implications for the aging of individuals in rural places. Additionally, it offers insights rural communities can use to understand and be pro-active regarding rural aging and return migration of adult children.

14.5.1.1 Relevance to Rural Aging

People age in rural places when they live continuously in rural communities, and when they move there later in life. The literature on elderly migration tells us that older migrants to rural places tend to move as empty nesters (Plane and Jurjevich 2009) and/or upon entering retirement (Litwak and Longino 1987).

While some elderly move, the majority do not, as they are among the least mobile of any population group. Whether or not rural people can age in place as they progress through the aging process is partly dependent on the migration decisions and residential choices of their adult children. If their children stayed into adulthood and beyond, aging parents are well positioned to receive support from them as they age.

When children move away as young adults, geographic distance between aging parents and adult children can act as a barrier to exchange of family support. If these adult children move back at a later time, however, aging parents can again benefit from proximity to family support networks.

Returning migrants in their 20s and early 30s usually move back to benefit their own children and to maintain affective bonds with their parents and other family members. This allows their children to connect with their aging parents and for their parents to enjoy the grandparent role. For a grandparent, opportunities for close and regular contact with grandchildren may take the place of natural amenities that more footloose elderly migrants seek out with a Stage 1 elderly move suggested by Litwak and Longino (1987).

Return migrants in their late 30s and 40s tend to move back to assist their aging parents, mostly in their business but also in their daily lives. This substitutes for aging parents moving closer to them (as suggested as a Stage 2 move in the Litwak-Longino model.) Quite a few conversations revealed that adult children moved in response to a health crisis, and not to offer routine support. Their returning move is, at times, a substitute for the Stage 3 move to a care facility proposed by Litwak and Longino. Whether adult children's return is a substitute for a Stage 2 or 3 elderly move vis-à-vis Litwak-Longino's model, adult children's move back to rural communities improves their parents' quality of life. Their return move replaces the need to uproot and relocate their aging parents and allows elderly parents to live through the aging process in a familiar environment.

14.5.1.2 Relevance for Communities

Returning migrants revealed that the presence of parents in rural places is critically important in drawing adult children back to rural towns, even in the instances where return moves are primarily motivated by concerns for children. Rural communities should become cognizant of how important aging parents are for re-attracting the next generation of adult children and even the subsequent generation.

Towns that are well positioned for their older population to age in place may also be positioned to draw in a younger generation of adults and their children. Favorable conditions for elderly include access to private and public services, especially health care, housing, and transportation. Other mechanisms that support aging in place evolve around long-term friendships and social networks that are often extensive and strong in rural communities. While addressed here only in the context of adult children moving back to take over a farm or business, other adult children in the labor force also need to find or create employment upon moving back.

Once elderly have moved away from small towns, the chance of towns re-attracting adult children and their families is greatly diminished. Out-migration of older people adds to the cycle of rural out-migration commonly found among younger cohorts. Therefore, sustaining infrastructure and services for elderly allowing them to age in place can yield important benefits for a rural community by drawing in younger generations of return migrants. Adult children who move back so that they

and their children live closer to aging parents can counter, to some extent, the population loss so widespread in many rural regions.

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